Building a Revolutionary Anarchism

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This article speaks on the failures of the anarchist movement to grow, despite numerous social movements, and how models of anarchist political organisation point the way forward to overcome these pitfalls.

Two recent events have thrown critical challenges at the anarchist movement in the United States: the financial crisis that began in 2008 and the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that sprung from that crisis in 2011. If the current political and economic outlook in this country is any indication, we should expect more frequent moments like these to arise. "Movement Moments" such as these are critical opportunities for revolutionaries of any variety, left or right. Acceptance of the status quo seems impossible.

Introduction

Two recent events have thrown critical challenges at the anarchist movement in the United States: the financial crisis that began in 2008 and the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that sprung from that crisis in 2011. If the current political and economic outlook in this country is any indication, we should expect more frequent moments like these to arise. "Movement Moments" such as these are critical opportunities for revolutionaries of any variety, left or right. Acceptance of the status quo seems impossible.

OWS, in particular, presented an incredible opportunity for anarchism. It was largely propelled by anarchists, in many places sustained by anarchists, and certainly got many people talking about anarchism. In Mark Bray's recent work *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street*, he looks at the influence of anarchism among organisers in OWS and found:

> *The interviews showed that 39% of OWS organisers self-identified as anarchists… I noticed that 30% of organisers who did not self-identify as anarchists (34% of all organisers didn't identify with any overarching label) listed anarchism as an influential element in their overall thought.*

These Movement Moments don't present themselves every day. It is essential for us to critically examine what our movement has gained, what it has lost, and what it needs to be stronger the next time that a Movement Moment happens. So, given the early influence of anarchism to OWS organisers, what was gained? In some places it seems that anti-foreclosure direct action groups have grown, in others the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) has seen growth in membership, and in general there is certainly a feeling that anarchist ideas are increasingly a part of the dialogue in many social justice movements. None are explicitly anarchist gains, though.

While the direct action anti-foreclosure movement and the IWW obviously have some internal anarchist influence, neither is expressly anarchist and both often actively avoid a strong connection to anarchists.

Bray concludes that Occupy Wall Street was a missed opportunity by anarchists:

> *When I step back to evaluate the tangible political outcome for the anarchist movement after months spent before a world spotlight with thousands of eager new people beating the doors down to get involved, I get the sinking feeling that to some extent we too "glided through these events like ectoplasm through a mist." We didn't even have any competing leftist formations. The field of political influence was left open to us and we didn't get as much out of it as we should have.*

Bray credits a lack of organisation as a key piece of this missed opportunity:

> *A lot of new organisers were inspired by the anarchist ethos and it would have been useful for anarchist organisers to be able to say, "Oh, you're interested in anarchism?*

Come to our discussion Thursday evening about 'anarchist perspectives on organising';"
or "Maybe you'd be interested in joining our anarchist organisation/collective."

Of course, the simple conclusion that anarchists should build, or even have, organisation isn't a new or comprehensive idea. But, looking to anarchists in South America, we see more clearly the concept of organising as anarchists and the role of an explicitly anarchist organisation. Given the success that anarchists have had in South America, it's certainly worth considering their methods and applying those that make sense in our context.

Building a Revolutionary Anarchism Speaking Tour

I chose to co-ordinate the Building a Revolutionary Anarchism Speaking Tour to help us take full advantage of these Movement Moments to build the popularity and influence of anarchism in the US. Originally expected to be only three or four stops, the final tour included seventeen stops throughout the entire US over most of the summer of 2013. I found that many others share a frustration with the lack of progress made by organised anarchism during these Movement Moments, and that many others are hunting for new ideas about effectively organising while also maintaining their ideals as anarchists. The timing was perfect. I found people all over the country that had initially been very excited by Occupy Wall Street, but had since found themselves struggling to envision unified next steps.

In my short time as a committed organiser for transformational and revolutionary change in the United States, I've seen multiple "Movement Moments" come and go. In each case, it seems we failed to grow our movement and learn the lessons necessary to prepare for the next moment. Along with a growing number of individuals and organisations in the country, it became clear to me that the lack of an explicitly anarchist organisation is one of our major weaknesses.

It was 2007 when I became convinced of the real value of creating explicitly ideological anarchist organisations. While in Argentina, I became acquainted with some members of the Red Libertaria of Buenos Aires, a formal anarchist communist organisation engaged in a wide variety of educational and organisational activities. Almost immediately, I was struck by the thoughtfulness, intelligence, sincerity, and effectiveness of the anarchist movement there. It's an inspiration that I've focused on sharing since my return to the United States.

The Building a Revolutionary Anarchism Speaking Tour helped me not only to share that inspiration, but to dive into some of the detailed differences in organising method that I saw in Argentina. But it wasn't simply minor organisational tweaks that I felt I needed to share. Anarchists in South America had developed a theory of the role of the revolutionary anarchist organisation, *especifismo*. It was this understanding of ourselves and our role in movement building that I felt a powerful urgency to share. And in June 2013, as the scheduled tour dates quickly jumped from five to seventeen, I knew that urgency to be a shared one.

Discomfort with Ideological Organisation in the US

To explain my perspective on ideological organisation prior to living in Argentina, I need to back up a bit. It's necessary to contrast my earlier experiences with those that I had in Argentina, to better express my current perspectives.

I would have described myself as an anarchist since sometime in the year 2000. I became aware of the ideas of anarchism through the anti-World Trade Organisation demonstrations in Seattle. At that time, I felt revolution right around the corner. Seeing resistance popping up around the country was inspiring and seemed connected to other movements internationally. I participated in a couple of black blocs, and even one effort to form a local anarchist group in Buffalo, called BuffalA (get it?). But I always had some real discomfort with ideological groups.

Basically, BuffalA tried gathering together everyone in Buffalo that called themselves an anarchist. We never had any agreed-upon principles. We couldn't agree if we should organise a militant labour movement towards taking over industry, or burn down all the factories. Some argued we shouldn't even make formal decisions. Some argued we shouldn't even meet — despite being at a meeting. Obviously, it didn't take long for this effort to collapse.

Having come from an industrial rust belt city, having grown up on and off of welfare, and having my family routinely evicted from awful housing, I always felt that the anarchist movement wasn't really connected to the people that needed to be at the front of it: those most impacted by capitalism, the state, patriarchy, and white supremacy.

Instead, we seemed to almost intentionally create an isolated subculture that was resistant to really engaging in the problems of the people around us. We talked about movements and general strikes and mass action, but we never seemed to want to genuinely engage with the people that we were talking about. This disconnectedness led to a strict purist mentality about what kind of groups were "anarchist enough" to work with. At the end of the day, it seemed clear to me that this kind of purity was actually just a way to rationalize our inactivity and isolation. Over time, we did have some good potlucks and punk shows, a Food Not Bombs, and an infoshop. But in the end, none of these projects really developed stronger organisers. None of them led to any sense that greater social change was on the way. None of them even led to a couple of new leaders from communities of colour or the working class. This isn't a very new problem in the US anarchist movement. In the 1930s, Lucy Parsons noted this:

> *Anarchism has not produced any organised ability in the present generation, only a few loose struggling groups scattered over this vast country, that come together in conferences occasionally, talk to each other, then go home… Do you call this a movement?… I went to work for the International Labour Defense because I wanted to do a little something to help defend the victims of capitalism who got into trouble, and not always be talking, talking, talking.*

In my experience, the same proved true. Eventually, the purity, isolation, and outright poor organising skill seemed disingenuous. I began spending more time organising with broader "social justice" and "worker rights" groups. While I often had pretty serious disagreements with the analysis of these groups, at least I saw some degree of real organising happening, and I felt less isolated in my own community. So, by the time I went to Argentina, I would have called myself an anarchist, but I wouldn't have argued for anarchist organisations.

Anarchism in Argentina

I didn't go to Argentina to learn about anarchism or anarchist organisation. I went to learn about the workers' movements that had been taking over their workplaces. I was intrigued about what made their workers' movements so much more militant than ours. The short answer I discovered is that they aren't afraid of ideology. Anarchist, socialist, and communist ideas were far more openly discussed than in the United States. Each of these ideological groupings had multiple organisations, spaces, and publications, and all had members inside of major unions, community organisations, and student groups.

It didn't take long for me to meet the Red Libertaria de Buenos Aires, a citywide organisation of anarchist communists that described themselves as "especifistas"—a word I had never heard and wouldn't really understand until months later. To a lesser extent, I also met members of the Federación Libertaria de Argentina.

Almost immediately, I saw real differences between the Red Libertaria and my previous experiences. At the first Red Libertaria event that I attended, I met workers organising in their workplaces, students organising in their student unions, people living in the *villas miserias* (shantytowns) engaged in their community organisations. This depth of presence in oppressed communities was almost the exact opposite of the isolated subcultural groups I was accustomed to in the US. Even more important than the diversity in the room, the conversation within was notably stronger. Anarchism was spoken of as a road map for people actually engaged in day-to-day struggles. Immediately, I felt I should pay attention to how they were organising. While there are certainly anarchists in the US that organise in a manner similar to Argentina, these methods don't seem to be the standard here. For the most part, Argentine organising was much different from what I had experienced in the US.

First, the Red Libertaria had developed clear points of unity. They were an expressly anarchist communist organisation. They weren't building an organisation of anyone that called themselves anarchists. Rather, they developed specific agreements as a pretext for joining. Often, this approach is treated as authoritarian in US anarchist circles. But having a clear set of unifying points made organising around those points so much easier, even if it results in smaller founding groups.

Second, the Red Libertaria didn't use consensus. This was an absolute shock to me. It had been ingrained in me that consensus was the only acceptable form of decision making among anarchists. On a global basis, our attitudes in the US are a bit of an anomaly. In most of the rest of the world, anarchists don't insist on consensus. As Andrew Cornell points out in *Oppose and Propose!: Lessons from Movement for a New Society*, Quakers brought consensus to US anarchism.

A vital door to creating much larger organisations rather than small non-sustaining affinity groups, could be opened by allowing for simpler and quicker forms of decision making.

Third, the Red Libertaria had dues. Members paid dues to ensure a well-funded organisation and to guarantee that everyone was sharing in the costs equally. This is important for a couple of reasons. When an organisation grows in membership, it also grows in resources that help to

fund a space, publications, a media wing, events publicity, etc. Meanwhile membership shares equitably in the costs of the organisation. It's been shown in many studies that poorer people will often give more out of their pockets than more well off members. However, a scaled dues system ensures that those with greater resources help to fund the organisation to a greater degree.

Combined, these differences in organising techniques paint a pretty obvious picture. Anarchists in Buenos Aires were building formal organisation and weren't afraid to be straightforward about that. There wasn't a need to constantly bend to nearly hegemonic anti-organisational views. I argue that the anarchist movement in the US has nothing to lose from at least some of us doing the same. There are plenty of anti-organisational or informal organisational groupings. Let's stop assuming that there is something anti-anarchist about building intentional and formal organisation. Simplistic and purist internal policing shouldn't prevent us from experimenting with ways to build towards revolution.

Especifismo

While even a handful of small process differences increase the strength of South American anarchist organisations, the critical distinctions don't stop there. Our differences run much deeper than that. The Red Libertaria had a more comprehensive understanding of the role of an ideological anarchist organisation — how it worked to build anarchist ideas and how it related to broader movements of working class people and communities. These ideas are called especifismo and have become an important part of the organised anarchist milieu in South America.

In the US, many of us were introduced to the notion of especifismo through the article, "Especifismo: The Anarchist Praxis of Building Popular Movements and Revolutionary Organisation in South America" by Adam Weaver in the eleventh issue of *The Northeastern Anarchist*. While this article wasn't my introduction to especifismo, I've found it to be a useful summary of those ideas. In his article, Weaver breaks down especifismo into three succinct points:

1. *The need for a specifically anarchist organisation built around a unity of ideas and praxis.*
2. *The use of the specifically anarchist organisation to theorize and develop strategic political and organising work.*
3. *Active involvement in and building of autonomous and popular social movements, which is described as the process of "social insertion."*

This basic breakdown provides a road map for the development of anarchist organisation that has an impact beyond itself.

The Specific Anarchist Organisation

In the statement, "Our Conception of Anarchist Organisation," the Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) say:

> *This model of organisation maintains that the function of the specific anarchist organisation is to bring together and co-ordinate the forces stemming from militant activities, building a tool for solid and consistent struggle that seeks a finalist objective: social revolution and libertarian socialism. We believe that work without (or with little) organisation, in which each one does what they want, poorly articulated or even isolated, is inefficient. The model of organisation we advocate seeks to multiply the result and effectiveness of militant forces.*

Simply put, it's through organisation and collective action that our individual efforts find a more compelling result. And, it's through organisation that we allow our efforts to sustain themselves beyond the activity and participation of solid individual militants and organisers. Organisations are capable of weathering through the more dormant moments between mass movements; something that is vital if we are to genuinely learn from the lessons of each movement in which we participate.

In Buffalo Class Action and in Rochester Red & Black, two local anarchist organisations inspired by especifismo, my experience has been that an explicitly anarchist organisation enables us to make the ideas of anarchism more appealing and relevant to the day-to-day struggles happening in our towns. In both cases, with little time, we found we were having an impact beyond ourselves as others heard our ideas and welcomed our intentional support for specific organisations and their fights. In the case of Rochester Red & Black, this influence seems to have gone beyond Rochester. Despite being a group of fewer than twenty, as I travelled the country speaking, I found quite a few people that were already familiar with Rochester Red & Black. This kind of impact couldn't have been accomplished to the same degree by any one individual in our organisation.

Developing Theory and Strategy

In anarchist circles we seem to be in a never ending conversation about tactics and whether tactics are effective. In this case, we're missing the forest for the trees. One particular tactic isn't universally effective or ineffective; its efficacy is based on how it is incorporated into a broader strategy. In many anarchist circles, there is very little conversation about strategy beyond simple tactical preferences, and these tactical choices are often based on personal predisposition for a degree of superficial militancy rather than effective integration into a larger strategy.

In "Huerta Grande," the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU) — the initial developers of the theory of especifismo — share the importance and connection of theory to the development of strategic organising.

> *Without a line for the theoretical work, an organisation, no matter how big it is, will be bewildered by circumstances that it cannot condition nor comprehend. The political line presumes a program, which means goals to be achieved at each step. The program indicates which forces are favorable, which ones are the enemy and which ones are only temporary allies. But in order to know that we must know profoundly the reality of our country. Therefore to acquire that knowledge now is a task of the highest priority. And in order to know we need a theory.*

Having a clear strategic program will simultaneously protect our organisations from manipulation by larger political forces and allow us to offer strategic direction to people in struggle for concrete gain. And if we can't offer a genuine path to building militant organisations that will eventually lead us into revolutionary conditions, how can we really call ourselves revolutionaries? Without a clear program developed by anarchists, we will find ourselves stuck working with reformist organisations while ignoring our own beliefs or being revolutionary in name only—speaking the most militantly, no matter how impractical our strategies really are.

Once we have such a theory and a program worked out, what to do with that program will be a new challenge entirely. Do we move to enact that program with just our own small group of committed, organised anarchists? The third point of Weaver's breakdown of especifismo helps to clarify the next step.

Social and Political Levels of Organising

In many ways, the notion of "social insertion" — as it's called in South America — is the heart of especifismo. To thoroughly understand social insertion, we first need to understand the distinctions between social movements and political organisations. Basically, social insertion is how organisations and movements interact as well as the role of the revolutionary anarchist political organisation within that relationship.

As I've said, the anarchist political organisation is simply an organisation of self-identified anarchists with an articulated unity of ideas and praxis that are working to develop a strategic program of revolution leading to anarchist social and economic structures. Of course, by its nature, this organisation will be fairly small in comparison to the general population and will expect a high level of commitment from its membership.

The other essential counterparts in our revolutionary efforts are social movements and their organisations. In "Social Anarchism and Organisation," the FARJ explains the central role of social movements in anarchist revolutionary thought:

If the struggle of anarchism points towards the final objectives of social revolution and libertarian socialism, and if we understand the exploited classes to be the protagonists of the transformation towards these goals, there is no other way for anarchism but to seek a way to interact with these classes.

Social movement is the mass organisation of exploited classes, including the unions of working people, the tenants' organisation in apartment complexes, the student unions in schools, the popular assemblies of neighbourhoods, and the self-organisation of the unemployed. Social movements gain their strength from mass participation more than from ideological purity. In a workplace struggle, all workers should be involved, not just the anarchist ones.

The union would marginalize itself to only serve those workers that identify as anarchists or require that a joining member be anarchist. To do so would weaken the union's ability to fight the bosses and, ultimately, weaken the struggle against capitalism.

Simply put, an anarchist and anti-vanguardist perspective of revolution is that the social movements themselves are the revolutionary actors; their organisations will ultimately bring about a social revolution. The anarchist organisation is not the vanguard leading the people to revolution. Rather, the anarchist organisation offers genuine revolutionary direction to social movements and the exploited classes that make up those movements.

Social Insertion and the Relation between the Social and Political

How do anarchists intend to engage with the broader classes that make up social movements? Especifista organisations argue that social insertion is the way that anarchists should engage with those broader classes. The importance of social insertion can't be overstated. As the FARJ say, "Social work and insertion are the most important activities of the specific anarchist organisation."

Social insertion is about engaging in social movements and their organisations as genuine participants.

As participants in a revolutionary anarchist organisation, we would then be participants and members of two or more organisations. Dual organisational orientation brings us into direct day-to-day contact with non-anarchists of the exploited classes, as they engage in organising and struggle for their survival.

Within these organisations, revolutionary anarchists should openly advocate for our positions, even when in the minority, to clearly articulate the perspective that we offer. Our ideas of direct action, horizontal organising, class struggle, and anti-capitalism should be openly discussed in the social movements as important strategic elements of gaining power for the social movement.

It is important to highlight that open advocacy does not mean that anarchists should attempt to capture leadership of these organisations or attempt to "ideologise" a social movement into an anarchist social movement. Instead, the purpose of open advocacy is to remind the broader social movements of the power that they hold and their ability to fundamentally restructure society.

Our revolutionary anarchist ideals will find traction in social movements through our influence as members of the social movement with a clear vision of a new world and with the organising skill of long-term militants. This means that, as anarchists we will teach our ideas to our companions in struggle by "doing and showing" much more than by "talking and explaining."

Active engagement in building the social movement, doing the necessary day-to-day work to exemplify a strong grassroots social movement member, and fighting on issues of survival for the exploited classes will grow our own influence.

Not only will engagement of this sort help the anarchist militants and organisers to grow their influence, but such direct activity is essential to informing their strategic and theoretical perspectives. A perspective divorced from the on-the-ground class struggle can't possibly know the important local actors, the way they interact, and who to work with and how. Knowing these details will make us stronger organisers and better allies to those in our communities and social movements.

Actively breaking down the division between committed, organised anarchists and broader, but likely more reformist, social movements is particularly important in the United States.

Since at least the 1950s leftist organisers have been actively, and sometimes brutally, separated from larger social movements. Over the decades, social movements have grown accustomed to

having no revolutionary perspectives openly discussed and argued. At the same time, ideological groups have grown accustomed to having little or no influence in the arena of social movements. The result has been social movements afraid of asserting their own power and even more afraid of discussing "radical" ideas. On the other hand, ideological groups have developed a habit of creating perfect models of organising that will never see the light of day and using them to denounce the social movements for failing in their mission. If we're ever to see real change, the division between revolutionary anarchists and social movements must be broken down. Social movements need us, and we need them.

Social Movements Need Us

I find myself frequently speaking in anarchist circles. In these circles, I've noticed a strong understanding of all the ways in which social movements need anarchists and our perspectives.

The anarchist critique on the strategies and tactics used by most movements are familiar. Unfortunately, these critiques are frequently used to denounce social movements and rationalize our lack of activity rather than to propose more meaningful ways in which to engage.

However, revolutionaries engaged in social movements often agree with our perspectives and would also like to see them utilized.

One very obvious strategic perspective of anarchists that seems utterly lost on those in more reformist social movements is the trap that electoral and legislative campaigns really are. The anarchist perspective of direct action as the primary means to demand change is critical to redirecting energy in many social movements away from their failed reliance on electoral politics.

When unified and concerted activity by thousands of individuals is your primary source of power, as it generally is for social movements, hierarchical organisation is a huge impediment to your own power. The notions of horizontal organisation offered by anarchists allow for the individual rank-and-filer to have a genuine sense of ownership of their organisations and the decisions of those organisations, which in turn leads to more committed and concerted activity on the part of those members.

Many social movements exist specifically for empowering groups of people in exploited classes. In effect, this is participation in class struggle. Unfortunately, many such groups have no intentional focus on class struggle. This confusion leads to serious strategic blunders in selecting allies, accepting funding, and granting influence.

Without an understanding that the organisation must build its own power to engage in class struggle more effectively, many organisations undermine themselves. They hand internal power over to those that would otherwise be class enemies, they accept funding with its many strings from those same enemies, and then wonder why they can't actually build power. In truth, they've been coopted as a symptom of their own deficient class consciousness.

In all of these situations, anarchism has a clear perspective to offer to social movements that would help them strengthen themselves. And if the anarchists involved were more interested in strengthening the social movement than they are in always being right, then they will know when and how to engage those internal debates.

We Need Social Movements

What many anarchist circles in the United States tend to forget is how important a real connection to broader social movements is for the anarchist tendency. Rooting the ideas of anarchism in the concrete day-to-day struggles of marginalized people gives anarchism a necessary grounding in reality.

In the immediate sense, there is a clear need for organiser training in the US anarchist movement. After decades of organising largely in insular circles of other anarchists, we've lost many of the large-scale organising and institution-creating skills that many of our predecessors possessed. The historic difficulties of keeping infoshops and other anarchist spaces alive are an obvious result of these basic deficiencies. Given the recent excitement generated by the IWW, in the anarchist milieu one would expect greater growth in membership. The waxing and waning of local anarchist organisations is often less the result of some inherent problem with the notion of organisation than it is the result of simply lacking basic organisational skill of local anarchists. Basic organisation of meetings, maintenance of local publications, development of strong events and mobilizations, and building local institutions of our movements are all things that we could stand to learn from broader social movements.

Our collective weakness in organising around peoples' everyday experiences and developing effective responses has led to another huge problem: a disconnect between anarchism and working-class communities and communities of colour. These are precisely the communities where the self-emancipatory ideas of anarchism need to be rooted. And just as importantly, the daily experiences of these folks help to inform the strategies, tactics, and thinking of organisers. There is no way that the anarchist movement can claim to have any genuinely revolutionary potential without being rooted in those communities that most need revolution.

A deeply rooted connection to the realities of everyday people has a more profound impact than simply informing our organising strategies and tactics; it also gives our ongoing theoretical development a similar connection to reality. Many modern theories emanating from the US anarchist milieu have very little meaningful connection to the realities of marginalized people in our communities, and when we allow ourselves to remain only in these insular communities, we eventually have debates that are totally unintelligible to the people around us. If we intend to build mass movements, this disconnect and its widening nature should frighten us.

Revolution, Counter-revolution, and Lessons Learned

The historical context of especifismo is important if we're to think about what it means for us today and the seriousness through which we should view these ideas. Especifismo came out of Uruguay after years of dictatorship.

Despite having an incredibly powerful and influential anarchist movement in the early 1900s, Uruguay entered a dictatorial period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. During this period, some members of the FAU engaged in an intense process to learn what allowed them to lose their country to fascism and how to strengthen future anarchist efforts. Especifismo embodied the ideas that came from that process and which quickly found thoughtful adherents in many other South American countries that were similarly escaping dictatorship.

Similar conclusions were made by other anarchists after similar experiences. As the Spanish Revolution devolved into a prolonged civil war, with the fascists taking a more obvious advantage, the Friends of Durruti rose to defend the importance of a specifically anarchist revolution. In their statement, "Towards a Fresh Revolution," the Friends of Durruti extol the need to learn from the mistakes of the July revolution:

> *Revolutions cannot succeed if they have no guiding lights, no immediate objectives. This is what we find lacking in the July revolution. Although it had the strength, the CNT did not know how to mould and shape the activity that arose spontaneously in the street. The very leadership was startled by events which were, as far as they were concerned, totally unexpected. They had no idea which course of action to pursue. There was no theory. Year after year we had spent speculating around abstractions. What is to be done? The leaders were asking themselves then. And they allowed the revolution to be lost.*

In Russia, anarchists were an essential part of the revolution. Anarchists there experienced one of the earliest betrayals as authoritarian communists destroyed the instruments of worker power that anarchists had helped to create and, ultimately, drove those anarchists out of the country. A few years later, based in France and looking back on the Russian Revolution, the group of Russian Anarchists called Dielo Truda spoke of their thoughts:

> *It was during the Russian Revolution of 1917 that the need for a general organisation was felt most deeply and most urgently. It was during this revolution that the libertarian movement showed the greatest degree of sectionalism and confusion. The absence of a general organisation led many active anarchist militants into the ranks of the Bolsheviks.*

In the "Organisational Platform for a General Union of Anarchists (Draft)," Dielo Truda set out their ideas of the importance of an explicitly anarchist organisation built around a unity of

theory and practice, as well as the role it would play and the methods it would utilize. "Anarchism is no beautiful fantasy, no abstract notion of philosophy, but a social movement of the working masses; for that reason alone it must gather its forces into one organisation, constantly agitating, as demanded by the reality and strategy of the social class struggle."

Whether it was seeing the losses of an explicitly anarchist revolution in Spain or seeing their country devolve into fascism, the lessons of how an anarchist movement can have a greater impact on a larger scale are remarkably similar. If we hope to have any meaningful impact in the United States as the world goes through ongoing crises in global capitalism, we must consider these lessons seriously.

A Question of Scale and Timing

We don't have time to learn these lessons in our own country. The political and economic reality of the world and the United States' role in the world is changing rapidly. The decline of the American standard of living, the approaching "minority majority," the weakening ability of the United States government to enforce its empire abroad, and impending ecological crises all make the status quo untenable for the elite as well as the exploited classes. Social upheaval will only increase in frequency. Spontaneous rebellion, whether militant or reformist, left or right, will happen.

Such uprisings and upheavals won't always go our way. They typically go the direction of those most capable of offering real or seemingly real answers well-organised anarchist movement capable of offering our ideals with the strategies and tactics to get us there, what makes us believe that any upheaval will move us towards true liberty, equality, and solidarity? I fear that if we don't actively work to further our influence and increase our skills in day-to-day political and economic organising, the battle of ideas will be won by much worse people.

Could the approaching "minority majority" be used as a lightning rod for empowering racist and fascist tendencies amongst a scared white working class?

The answer is yes, it already is. The membership of the Aryan Brotherhood is estimated as high as twenty thousand in and out of the prison system. The anti-immigrant sentiment of the Tea Party isn't hard to turn in a more explicitly fascist direction. What about the right wing "libertarians"? Is there any reason to believe that in a moment of social disruption that they wouldn't advocate for wholly private, for-profit policing to "secure order"?

These moments require us to do more than treat anarchism like an interesting book club. We need to engage in thoughtful, committed and sincere organising to prepare ourselves and our communities for the challenges that lie ahead. We need to develop an anarchism with deep roots in our struggling communities and work within those communities to develop a counter- hegemonic intellectual and organising tradition. It is and always has been the only hope for achieving an anarchist future and is essential to defending against any drift towards fascism. It's apparent to me that especifismo offers vital lessons for us to learn exactly these things.

Class Struggle Anarchist Network and Beyond

While I write this, the local organisation to which I belong, Rochester Red & Black, is engaged in a nationwide anarchist organisation along with a number of other local and regional organisations in the United States. Many of these organisations are informed and inspired by the methods of organising detailed by the especifista organisations in South America.

The development of this organisation hasn't been easy. And I don't imagine that the ongoing organising of the group will be easy either. It may last through to revolution, or it may fall apart. Either way, to go through the experiences and struggles with one another and develop such an organisation is essential to building the anarchist movement in the US.

Personally, I have high hopes that such a formation will lead to an anarchist movement that continues to hold its revolutionary ideas while building real depth in our neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, and families. Without a popular anarchism, we can't have a revolutionary anarchism.

Colin O'Malley is an anarchist and organiser living in Rochester, NY, USA. In 2007, he spent the year in Buenos Aires, Argentina where he became convinced of the necessity of specific anarchist organisations. On returning to the US, he helped found Buffalo Class Action and Rochester Red & Black. Through these organisations he has participated in the series of Class Struggle Anarchist Conferences that led to the 2013 founding of the nationwide Black Rose Anarchist Federation.

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